The Evening Star

With Sunday Morning Edition

Published by THE EVENING STAR NEWSPAPER CO., Washington, D. C.

SAMUEL H. KAUFFMANN, *Chairman of the Board*

CROSBY N. BOYD, *President* NEWBOLD NOYES, *Editor*

BENJAMIN M. McKELWAY, *Editorial Chairman*

A-14 FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 1967

'Reforming' the CIA

There is one hopeful note in the report of a high-level study committee which the President appointed in February after the uproar over the disclosure that CIA money had been covertly used to finance some activities of the National Student Association and other groups. This note is that the committee members do not believe the policies which they recommend will "unduly handicap" the CIA "in the exercise of its national security responsibilities."

The implication is, of course, that there will be some handicap. And the observation would be thoroughly suspect if it were not for the fact that Richard Helms, CIA Director, was one of the committee members. (The others were Nicholas Katzenbach, Under Secretary of State, and John W. Gardner, HEW Secretary.) If Helms subscribes to the assertion that his own agency will not be unduly handicapped, that is an assurance which will have to be taken at face value.

We have never thought there was anything inherently wrong with what the CIA was doing. No innocents were corrupted, no unworthy purpose was promoted. On the contrary, especially at the time the subsidy program was started, it served a national interest of large importance. The committee report concedes that this is so.

Still, when the shrill cries of protest began to be heard across the land, it doubtless became necessary, politically and otherwise, for the President to do something. Four administrations had been fully aware of and had approved what the CIA was doing. But that counted for nothing when the covert activity was exposed. So the President, falling back on an ancient recourse, appointed a study committee.

There will be no more covert financing, direct or indirect, of any "educational or private voluntary organizations." The committee recommends, and the President will "seriously consider," a proposal to establish "a public-private mechanism to provide public funds openly" for such activities as heretofore were being financed covertly.

At best, it is going to be extremely difficult to carry on, under such a setup, the overseas cultural activities that the CIA has been subsidizing. The young student or labor leader who effectively opposed the Communists at international meetings was often a sort whose politics would not appeal, let us say, to a conservative member of the House Appropriations Committee. Inevitably, now that public funds are to be provided openly, the stand of our unofficial delegates at such meetings will become a public issue—and their effectiveness as representatives of the free world will be hard to maintain.

But the President's committeemen have done the best they could. The end result of their work probably will be prejudicial in some degree to the national interest. But that, we suppose, is a price that must be paid if the "democratic process," like Caesar's wife, is to be above suspicion—and never mind how the other side chooses to play the game.